Louisiana Fellowship People

Newsletter of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Louisiana

cbfla.org

IDENTITY:

We are a fellowship of Baptist Christians and churches who share a passion for the Great Commission of Jesus Christ and a commitment to Baptist principles of faith and practice.

VISION:

Being the presence of Christ in the world.

MISSION:

Serving Christians and churches as they discover and fulfill their God-given mission.

Volume 13, No. 5

September-October, 2006

3rd Annual Stagg-Tolbert Forum Features Portrayals of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Clarence Jordan

Al Staggs brings modern prophets to life October 7 in Baton Rouge

"One act of obedience is better than a hundred sermons," said one. Said another (with grinning irony) to a preacher who was proudly pointing out a new $10,000 cross on his church, "Time was when Christians could get those crosses for free."

Though these two larger-than-life figures have joined that great cloud of witnesses, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Clarence Jordan return in Dr. Al Staggs' lively portrayals October 7, at University Baptist in Baton Rouge.

In its third year, the Stagg-Tolbert Forum for Biblical Studies is named for two beloved pastors, professors, and New Testament scholars – Malcolm Tolbert and the late Frank Stagg. Making excellence in biblical scholarship accessible to the lay person is the forum's goal.

Going a step further this year, the program illustrates biblical scholarship fleshed out in the practical application of lives yielded in obedience, positioned squarely against the culture of the day, and "in scorn of the consequences." Bonhoeffer and Jordan were profoundly shaped by the Sermon on the Mount and the joy and challenge of community as described in Acts.

For Bonhoeffer, it meant leaving the security of American academia to return to Germany and the underground witness against Hitler. "I shall have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people." The decision cost his life.

For Jordan, it meant forming in 1942, an interracial Christian farm community in rural Georgia. For over two decades he held firm to Koinonia, deep Christian fellowship, sharing and communion. Despite gunshots, explosions, boycotts and frequent threats, this farmer-preacher, ever returning to his Greek New Testament, persevered in the task of being a "demonstration plot of the Kingdom of God."

Staggs brings the beauty of an artist, the rigor of a scholar, and the love of a brother to the telling of these stories. Bonhoeffer's close friend and biographer Eberhard Bethge, called Stagg's portrayal "an astonishing fullness of Dietrich, the personality and the message." Millard Fuller, a confidant of Jordan, marveled at his friend's person before him. Jordan's son, Lenny, remarked that Staggs "captured the essence of daddy. [His] cadence, inflection, mannerisms, and humor were so real, it was hard not to think back thirty years ago when we would sit and listen to daddy speak."

With degrees from Hardin Simmons, Southwestern Seminary and Harvard Divinity School, Dr. Staggs also brings twenty-eight years experience in ministry. After the presentation he will engage us in conversation about the witness of these two great souls and our task in applying the Word to our lives today.

More on the legacy of Bonhoeffer and Jordan on page 4

Al Staggs presents:

Dietrich Bonhoeffer & Clarence Jordan

Stagg-Tolbert Forum for Biblical Studies

Saturday October 7
10am to 2pm

University Baptist Church
Baton Rouge

Program is free, lunch $7; Reserve meal with church by Oct. 1 at 225-766-9474 *or* UBC, 5775 Highland, BR LA 70808 *or* scresie@ubc-br.org. Hotel info available through UBC.

Initiative to New Orleans Churches in Full Swing
SEE INSIDE

Re-Building, Re-Birth

There are still neighborhoods in New Orleans that look frozen in time – like the floods Katrina brought a year ago were only weeks gone. In a city where thousands of spray-painted "X's" on buildings mark the spot of loss – maybe of life, surely material possessions – there are churches working to return to normalcy, to meet needs of hurting people, and to help rebuild their communities.

But those churches need help, too. They need encouragement. They need prayer. And according to local pastors they need hands and feet to help rebuild their buildings. That's why CBF, Baptist Builders International, and a coalition of various groups, have partnered in rebuilding five African American churches.

Volunteers from throughout Louisiana and the whole continent are working side-by-side with local members on church buildings, as well as pastors' homes. Most of the churches have already started renovation but have exhausted their resources and now need help completing the job.

Volunteers Still Needed
Contact Reid Doster at (985) 222-6900 or reid_doster@hotmail.com.

Baptist Builders has made inroads among New Orleans pastors by providing more than 100 personal grants to help them recover. With church members dispersed nationwide, tithing halted for many churches, leaving a funding shortfall for a pastor's salary and church rebuilding efforts. One pastor exhausted his personal retirement funds in efforts to restore his church. Another pastor has seen his family only twice in ten months, as they were evacuated to Dallas. This initiative will restore his home, reunite his family and move the church closer to ministering again at full capacity.

Restoring churches allows members to continue vital ministry like that at Greater Emmanuel Baptist Church, which pre-Katrina had active evangelistic teams and a growing ministry among drug addicts.

Leaving Mark On "New St. Mark's"

The roof leaked. The ceiling was stained. The carpet musty, and the wood paneling warped. It was a mess, but the congregation of New St. Mark's Baptist, not only returned from far off cities to worship as a church family, but shared use of their damaged facility with two other congregations whose buildings were ravaged by Katrina. Soon, the facility will be in great shape to be shared with even more displaced congregations.

As this initiative was launched, Reid had no idea how many folks would be willing to endure New Orleans' heat and humidity. "But the Lord had His plans and, between July 15 and August 15, we have had one-hundred and seven volunteers give of their time to this effort. Before we could spool up our…recruitment campaign, God's people started 'dropping out of the sky.' A group of fifty-five from Redeemer Lutheran Church, Fort Collins, Colorado, called to say their work-site had fallen through and asked if I knew where they might help out!"

OH CANADA!

Most of the funding for this $200,000 project comes from Canadian Baptists who have also been a formidable volunteer force.

Disaster response stories compiled from reports by Carla Wynn and Reid Doster

"Gayle Wager, of University - Baton Rouge, emailed me about her son-in-law from Journey of Faith Church, Manhattan Beach, California, who was ready to fly in with a group of twelve. That was followed by a call from Pastor Joe Carlson, Good News Church, Wisconsin, who flew down with twenty-one volunteers. Joe's group had planned to go to Brazil and, at the last minute, the airline went bankrupt and they needed a place to work."

"Then came a group of ten Boy Scouts, several of the Hindu faith, from Granada Hills, California, followed by some hard-working folks from First Baptist, Moorhead, Kentucky, under the leadership of Pastor Don Mantooth, a veteran leader of CBF volunteers."

"Don returned home with his team and wrote the following: 'Our group had a brief meeting after church last night. I got nothing but good feelings from all of them. It was a spiritually uplifting time for all of us. We felt more blessed and more needed than with any other project we have worked on. It was good for us.'"

Reid continues: "This week, we are blessed with a team from First Baptist, Clemson, South Carolina. Their professional backgrounds include: psychologist, chemist, accountant, mechanical engineer, entomologist, and professor of poultry science!"

"Second Baptist of Little Rock, will send volunteers over Labor Day weekend, and just today I received a call from John Wyatt, First Baptist, Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, who will bring thirty seasoned volunteers in mid-October."

Among this group of New Orleans pastors is a commitment to renewal, an unwillingness to accept defeat, and courage to persevere. "I look into their eyes and see amazing courage," said Reid. "These pastors are not going to abandon their people but remain deeply committed. We would do well to honor, bless and learn from them."

Church-to-family Partnerships

Families are known for lending helping hands, throwing house-warming showers, and visiting every weekend – at least the church family of University- Baton Rouge, did this as they helped two Lacombe families rebuild their lives following Katrina.

For eight consecutive Friday and Saturdays, church members traveled 80 miles to work on the homes of Naomi Ducre and Althea Ducre. Both women experienced flooding in their homes, losing most of their

See FAMILY, page 8

The Migrant's Meal

by Jay Hogewood

Immigration has presented a special question of late. For the most part, our politicians have to handle the issues through legislation and reform. What makes a person legal in this land is the great hoop that our elected officials are trying to work through. We need to be aware of the issues; but more importantly, we should be mindful of the people involved: mainly that they are people, just like you and me.

Many "illegal aliens," we sometimes call them, live and work among us. Most of the time we probably don't think to ask; just as they don't think to tell. Perhaps it's because we move around each other with a mutual understanding: the shared idea of respect one for the other—the one who is the stranger, the foreigner. That's a biblical ideal, a particularly Christian notion. From our vantage point, sitting in a pew before God and his glory at this Supper Table, feeling like family (like God's children, as the epistle names us), I wonder how we should look at it: how we with our Christian eyes should perceive immigration to be. Maybe (for once) as a child of God I'd like to see things in simpler ways rather than complicated ones. Shouldn't something of our belonging to God in Christ shape our perspective of those who don't officially belong to anything, to anywhere, to anybody? Being in the world, not of it, should make us feel something of a common bond?

I was a stranger and you invited me in. - Jesus

Jesus as Alien - Matthew 2
"The Flight Into Egypt" **James Tissot, 1836-1902**

A friend of mine from Dallas has a brother who knows this guy named Roger in south Texas (you still with me?)—way south, as in a spit and a holler from the Mexican border *(I'm thankful that this story comes from Gordon Atkinson [reallivepreacher.com], "A Thousand Little Maps" from www.christiancentury.org)*: forty miles from the Rio Grande. Roger's got a ranch down there in the middle of nowhere—mesquite trees, rattle snakes, tumbleweed and barbed wire. No paved roads. No street signs. No Starbucks®.

The great God, mighty and awesome...loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt. Deuteronomy 10:17-19

Roger visits his ranch a couple times a month on weekends. Other than that, the wooden room has a kitchen and a bathroom that stands empty under the scorching sun and the passing moon. My friend's brother asked Roger once about illegal immigrants—those from south of the border who scamper to freedom through the vast nothing of south Texas heat. Yep, now and again they pass through, says Roger. Not very often, though. They don't want to be seen. But sometimes you can tell they've passed this way.

Roger knows because he's seen what's left of their visits. He has the gumption to leave his ranch door unlocked. On the counter under the windowsill by the sink, Roger places cans of pork-n-beans, Vienna sausage®, fruit cups. On his door, Roger offers these words in Spanish in dark print: "Please turn off the water and close the door when you leave. Thank you."

Not so much an invitation as an expectation. The assumption rests on the grace that Roger knows something of real hospitality: that Christ himself knew how to fix a meal for a suspicious group of unauthorized travelers.

For 8 years, Roger has owned this ranch. Not one single time has he had so much as a scratch or a stain in his place. No theft. No vandalism. And each time Roger visits his property to restock the cabin, he finds 3 things: door shut, water off, food gone.

I guess none of us, including Roger, will ever know how many immigrants (legal or otherwise) stop by to gain the bearings, to rest and refresh. The gospel rises on this, though: an act of goodness, a measure of grace that no one knows how deep it touches except for those who eat and drink what's been offered. My friend's brother says a stopping place like that is a point of grace larger than the land, larger than life.

The Communion Table is our stopping place. Many an immigrant has migrated to this table in search of a bite of bread, a sip of water; just enough to go on, just enough to know God again. At this Table, we taste the meaning of God's love for us. The result and proof of God's love is being a child of God and being called such (see D. Moody Smith, First, Second and Third John, 77).

This meal bids us come and go. To be nourished and to nourish others with the love of God in Christ: a love we've been given and are expected to give others.

God unlocks the door; we only have to come in and see. See what love the Father has given unto us, that we should be called children of God. That is what we are (1 John 3:1). You know the only thing we have to do? Just come, receive. Plus, you can leave the door unlocked and wide open. Amen.

Jay Hogewood, Pastor of University-Baton Rouge serves as CBF-LA Moderator.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer
1906-1945

A forest of swastika flags surrounded the altar of Magdeburg Cathedral. The dean of the cathedral in 1933 declared: "The swastika flags that round the altar radiate hope—hope that the day is at last about to dawn." By contrast, only two days after Hitler seized power, Bonhoeffer gave a radio address called "Christ Is Our Fuhrer" in which he proclaimed, "The Church has only one altar, the altar of the Almighty…The Church has only one pulpit, and from the pulpit faith in God will be preached and no other faith."
Before he could finish, the microphone was turned off.

Thus he became a central leader in the small "Confessing Church" in opposition to the wide spread support of Hitler by the German church. Teaching in an "illegal" seminary, two of his most popular works were born. The Cost of Discipleship, based on the Sermon on the Mount, is a stinging indictment of the church that fosters the distortion of "cheap grace." Life Together came out of the fellowship and mentoring of seminarians and is a classic on Christian community.

Arriving in America in 1939, where a safe and fruitful scholarly career was assured, he stayed only a month. After reading a passage in Isaiah – "He who believes does not flee" – Bonhoeffer boarded the last ship to leave America for Europe before the war began.

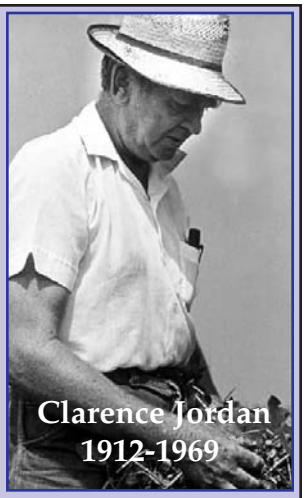
A prodigy and world class theological mind, it is easy to forget his monumental works (still actively studied) were written by a man in his 20's and 30's. He casts a complex figure. Once a pacifist, he had plotted to assassinate Hitler. Once a professor, he had become a double agent. Once a comfortable Lutheran pastor, he had stripped his own soul of facile Christian solutions that had become meaningless in the utter evil of the Holocaust. Faith does not exist apart from human conflict, Bonhoeffer said, but is born of complete engagement in this world.

He was hanged in the concentration camp at Flossenbürg on April 9, 1945, forced by guards to walk naked to the gallows. He was one of four members of his immediate family to die at the hands of the Nazi regime. The letters he wrote during these final two years of his life were posthumously published as Letters and Papers from Prison. His wrestling with an evil time and struggling within himself to remain faithful is captured in his poem "Who Am I?".

From Tegel Prison, Berlin, July 1944

Who am I? They often tell me
I stepped from my cell's confinement
Calmly, cheerfully, firmly,
Like a squire from his country-house.
Who am I? They often tell me
I used to speak to my warders
Freely and friendly and clearly,
As though it were mine to command.
Who am I? They also tell me
I bore the days of misfortune
Equally, smilingly, proudly,
Like one accustomed to win.

Am I then really all that which other men tell of?
Or am I only what I myself know of myself?
Restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage,
Struggling for breath, as though hands were compressing my throat,
Yearning for colors, for flowers, for the voices of birds,
Thirsting for words of kindness, for neighborliness,
Tossing in expectation of great events,
Powerlessly trembling for friends at an infinite distance,
Weary and empty at praying, at thinking, at making,
Faint, and ready to say farewell to it all?
Who am I? This or the other?
Am I one person today and tomorrow another?
Am I both at once? A hypocrite before others,
And before myself a contemptibly woebegone weakling?
Or is something within me still like a beaten army,
Fleeing in disorder from victory already achieved?
Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine.
Whoever I am, Thou knowest,
O God, I am Thine!


Clarence Jordan
1912-1969

Tension fills the air. Voices grow louder. One man swings a section of iron pipe and declares, "Just like the whites kill a Negro for this, I'm going to kill a white man." As the crowd is at the point of taking up weapons, the only white man at the meeting steps forward and says, "If a white man must die for this, . . . let it be me. Do it now." Clarence Jordan's words shock these men, many of them his friends, into silence. The crowd looks at the situation through new eyes. They begin to work for a different response to the injustice.

The time was the late 1930's. The place was the dreary inner city of Louisville where Jordan had come to seminary. Like his classmate Frank Stagg, Jordan had been captured by the Greek New Testament and was completing his doctorate in its study. It was not the last time he would face racial fear and hatred. In the future it would come from fellow whites and Georgians livid that he would dare eat at the same table with blacks and engage them in Christian fellowship.

What makes a son of the South born in 1912 act that way? Will Campbell has called him "fearless." He took Jesus seriously. He went several steps further than the average professing Christian. He lived and breathed what Jesus taught without compromise, and established a community of believers committed to the point of disposing of all personal wealth and property to put flesh on the ideas contained in the New Testament.

"The promise of something wise or something funny or just something good to know danced in this man's eyes," said biographer Dallas Lee. "Tall, high-hipped, hands jammed into blue-jean pockets, floppy straw hat shading a grin—dusty from peanut rows, greasy from the tractor shop, bespectacled from persistent study—the man was full of the unexpected, so you listened expectantly." When he talked about Jesus, it was a Jesus "who came alive in his drawl and walked the red roads of Georgia in his mind."

Jordan was engaging and humorous, a popular speaker at Ridgecrest and as religious focus speaker on Baptist college campuses. Invitations however abruptly stopped in the South as the civil rights era began to heat up. A number of his talks are captured on tape. They have aged well and still speak to our age.

"Fear is the polio of the soul which keeps us from walking by faith."

"Faith is not belief in spite of evidence but a life in scorn of the consequences."

Habitat for Humanity was born at Koinonia Farm. Millard Fuller calls Jordan the spiritual father of Habitat.

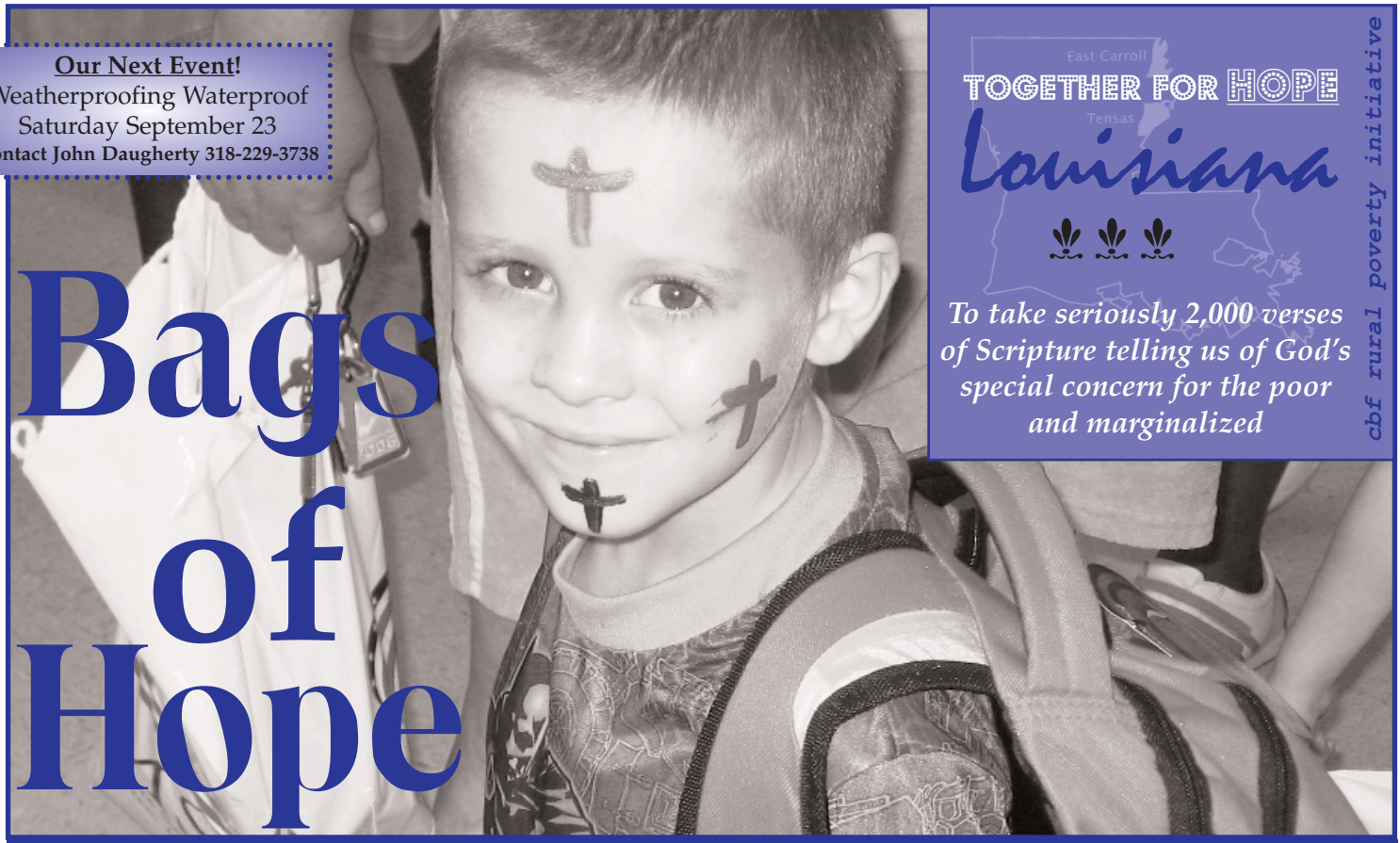
"The Scriptures should be taken out of the classroom and stained-glass sanctuary and put out under God's skies where people are toiling and crying and wondering, where the mighty events of the good news first happened." A colloquial Georgian paraphrase, at turns startling, humorous and compelling, some have experienced Cotton Patch as if reading Scripture for the first time.

He then gave them a Comparison: "A certain rich fellow's farm produced well. And he held a meeting with himself and he said, 'What shall I do? I don't have room enough to store my crops.' Then he said, 'Here's what I'll do: I'll tear down my old barns and build some bigger ones in which I'll store all my wheat and produce. And I will say to myself, 'Self, you've got enough stuff stashed away to do you a long time. Recline, dine, wine, and shine!' But God said to him, 'You nitwit, at this very moment your goods are putting the screws on your soul. All these things you have grubbed for, to whom shall they really belong?' That's the way it is with a man who piles up stuff for himself without giving God a thought." Lk 12:16-21

Now faith is the turning of dreams into deeds; it is betting your life on the unseen realities. Heb 11:1

When time began, the Idea already was. The Idea was at home with God, and the Idea and God were one. This same Idea was at home with God when time began. Through him the universe was made, and apart from him not one thing came to be. In him was life, and the life was humanity's light. And the light shines on in the darkness, and the darkness never quenched it…Well, the Idea became a man and moved in with us. We looked him in the face—the face of an only son whose father is full of kindness and integrity. Jn 1:1-5,14

Our Next Event!
Weatherproofing Waterproof
Saturday September 23
Contact John Daugherty 318-229-3738



Bags of Hope

TOGETHER FOR HOPE
Louisiana

To take seriously 2,000 verses of Scripture telling us of God's special concern for the poor and marginalized

cbf rural poverty initiative

Photos - John and Phyllis Daugherty

What Is the Price of Being the Presence of Christ?

by John Daugherty

On August 8 and 12 CBF-LA was able to share with the students of two of our more impoverished parishes, book bags filled with school supplies, assisting in the successful beginning of another school year. The cost of those 600 bags was around $18,000 plus the cost of gas to gather and distribute the bags from across the state. That's just about $30 per student. But how does that act of kindness equal being the presence of Christ?

The biblical stories of Jesus indicate that Jesus was normally doing unexpected acts of kindness out of his love and grace, and he was the Christ. I think what Jesus was trying to tell us is that if we want any credibility for offering assistance for the more ethereal things of the spirit, we better be willing to offer assistance with the mundane, the day-to-day matters of life. People live in the day-to-day and only hope for the unseen benefits of a spiritual life. Another way of putting it was more direct and painful to comprehend: "If any one would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me." That's what Jesus said.

Let's think about that statement. For modern folks, there is little threat from the idea of the cross, so how does that translate to you and me? I think it means we aren't willing to compromise our faith, our understanding of Christ and his presence simply for the sake of saving our own lives or securing our own safety. It really answers the previous statement of "deny yourself." We aren't very good at that expectation. We don't like denying ourselves. We like what we like. We enjoy our comfort and safety. We want to eat what we want and do what we enjoy. The fact is, we prefer it if others deny themselves to ensure our own security and luxury.

So what is the cost of being the presence? Jesus said to the rich young man, "Sell all you have and give to the poor." It was very rewarding this summer to be able to share a few dollars worth of supplies and a few hours of effort to fill and distribute those book bags. Thank you for your support and participation. Let's be looking for more ways to be Christ in a world so caught up in the mundane, day-to-day process of living.

Thanks to churches and individuals throughout the state who contributed and members of University Baptist who assisted in distribution..

A Church Without Walls

Bridgewater In The First Half Year

by Reid Doster, Pastor

Sunday, August 13, 2006, marked the six-month anniversary of the birth of CBF-LA's newest congregation – Bridgewater Church, West St. Tamany Parish. Fifty people attended this worship service and fifty-three made it to Friends restaurant on the Tchefuncta River for the first of seven "Second Sunday Love Feasts" that will lead up to Bridgewater becoming a duly-constituted church on February 11, 2007.

We were able to provide a delicious South Louisiana seafood buffet, at no charge to anyone, due to a love gift from a recently-deceased friend who loved the people of Bridgewater Church and wanted us to enjoy a great meal … on his tab!

bridgewaterchurch.info

Recently, I asked the group a simple question: "What brings us together?" Some of the responses included: "to grow spiritually," "to belong and have a voice," "to shape meaningful outcomes," "to feel needed," "to be safe with people," "to create something new," "to not be forgotten," "to feel worthwhile," "to help the community," "to be with fellow believers," "to heal, grow and get well," and "to support common beliefs." We want to stay in touch with the basic human needs that define our mission.

Over the next six months, Bridgewater also will hammer out responses to six additional questions: "What do we believe?," "How can I discover my ministry?," "Who 'runs' the church?," "Where do the offerings go?," "What does membership mean and how do I become one?," and "What about property and a building?"

An ad hoc team will meet monthly, prayerfully to consider everyone's input, refine ideas, present them in an understandable way and then submit for approval by the newly-chartered membership that will assemble February 11.

Bridgewater's First Love Feast

Bridgewater's strategy is simple. First, we build a deeper sense of community through small group experiences that include fellowship, prayer, study and ministry. This month our Thursday morning ladies Bible study group packed one hundred and eighty book bags for CBF-LA's 'Bags of Hope' project. Our current weekly groups are: Grief and Hope, Safe People, The Book of James, The Sermon On the Mount and The Parables of Jesus. We also have a bi-monthly Movie Group.

Second, we make constant reference to four core values: the priesthood of all believers, the right of every Christian to interpret and apply scripture under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, the autonomy of every local church, and freedom of religion, for religion, and from religion.

Third, we preach a simple Gospel that makes practical application of scripture to everyday problems, and is inclusive of all people. We pray to be a church without walls, and claim the promise that Christ will draw all people to Himself, if He is lifted up.

Of the fifty people in worship last Sunday, only ten have a Baptist background. Last Sunday, we were visited again by three single adults who attended mass at Roman Catholic churches before coming to our worship service. They do not hesitate to participate with us in The Lord's Supper. Others are from Methodist, Episcopal and Presbyterian backgrounds. I have to say the leadership skills among these diverse people is impressive. They seem more than passingly interested in CBF's stated values and are drawn to Bridgewater's style of worship, which combines rich elements from various traditions.

Since our first worship service, Bridgewater has given ten percent of our regular Sunday offerings to CBF-LA. This commitment is hard-wired into our DNA. We would not exist without the support of CBF churches, especially Broadmoor-Baton Rouge, First-Shreveport, and Emmanuel-Alexandria. Our prayer is that a portion of our offering to CBF will go to help support another new church start in Louisiana.

READERS WRITE

Dear Sirs,

I was shocked when I read Daniel Vestal's column entitled "Iraq, Immigration, Incompetence...It's Time" in the most recent issue of Louisiana Fellowship People. Political views, whether Right or Left, are ordinarily passionately held and when introduced into a religious organization become a source of potentially severe discord.

Although not directed at a current candidate, in my opinion some of Vestal's comments are at the very least the kissing cousin of electioneering. May I refer you to the section on Electioneering by Churches in the Religious Liberty Council Issue Guide published by the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty? The last sentence in that section states: electioneering "would invite a highly divisive element into virtually every congregation, tend to balkanize congregations into Democratic and Republican congregations, and engender a corrosive mix of religion and politics that would turn pulpit prophets into puppets of politicians."

What applies to churches also applies to CBF. I believe that if Vestal continues to take such political stances within his official duties as Coordinator of CBF he will place CBF in danger of becoming a political puppet of Howard Dean and the Democratic National Committee.

I was initially upset at the newsletter's publication of this column; however, I suppose I should thank you since I wouldn't have seen it otherwise. At the General Assembly in Atlanta I became concerned that Vestal was getting our fellowship involved in politics by remarks made during his address. This column confirms my suspicions. I was drawn to CBF as a religious organization that espoused traditional Baptist beliefs and am most definitely not interested in CBF getting involved in politics, either Right or Left.

Sincerely, **Glenn Girod, M.D. Baton Rouge**

Editor Responds:

Dear Dr. Girod,

Your desire to avoid electioneering and divisiveness is well taken. I also have high regard for the Baptist Joint Committee's admonition to be wary of turning "pulpit prophets into puppets of politicians." We moderates tend to avoid controversy, and prefer being a "moderating influence" in a polarized world. CBF is diverse--a large tent. As such, you can be sure some CBF'ers thought Dr. Vestal went way too far and others not nearly far enough. Why take such a risk? Why print it?

We are not a denomination, but are Baptist and thus sport a tenuous hierarchal structure at best. Vestal is not our Pope (certainly not infallible), but I have come to view him as our Pastor. "Freedom of the pulpit" and a prophetic authority comes with that role. It takes courage to be "prophetic" and there is never an easy time. Martin Luther King said that to those to whom he directed his activities no one ever thought his actions were wise or timely.

Of course, one person's prophetic stance may be another's meddling or pandering. There is no guarantee that the conservative or liberal or even moderate view on an issue is the right one. We must consider every issue prayerfully and in community and ask "What would Jesus do?' I submit Christians should hold political views (Republican, Democrat or otherwise) lightly and politicians even more gingerly. When Jesus called Herod a Fox, it was from an understanding of the fallen nature of power in this world.

Jesus clearly placed himself in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets in Luke 4 at the inauguration of his ministry by speaking up (good news) for the poor, prisoners, blind and oppressed, and he paid a price (vs 29). Thus the deciding factor for Christians on any issue, is how it impacts the vulnerable. We may disagree on the best way to do that, but the directive to be on that mission is not optional.

I appreciate the respectful tone of your disagreement. It is biblical to accept differences. Go no further than the disciples who contained a revolutionary (Simon the Zealot) and a "pawn" of the establishment (Matthew the Tax Collector.) Clarence Jordan commented on this,

See LETTER, page 8

Words to Make Fishers of Men

*Talk about your diversity. Louisiana native CBF missionary **Keith Holmes** and his wife and missionary partner **Mary van Rheenen**, adapt to cultural challenges for the sake of the Gospel daily. Their work with Romany (Gypsies) involves 20 distinct groups in Europe. Some are identified by their language, others by their location and still others by their occupation or religion. Strict internal laws among some of the Romany dictate with whom they may have table fellowship and what makes one unclean. Others have almost abandoned their language and old customs.*

Keith and Mary assist indigenous evangelists and church planters, support micro-economic development for the poor, and produce Romany Scripture and other Christian media. Mary explains there is no thorough translation of the Bible in Sinti Romani. "A believer started out on his own and did a bit. We have heard rumors of a priest doing a bit. Neither of these were ever published."

Work at present is being done by Wycliffe Bible translators. "They discovered that the Sinti, who are only functionally literate, did better with little books. So they have been publishing things as they are ready: a thin volume for the Gospel of Mark, a thin volume for parts of Genesis, a thin volume for the Gospel of John…It will be some time before the entire Bible will be ready to print, and these small publications also make it possible to get feedback on the work so far." She explains more of this work in this month's column.

"How are the translation projects going?" someone recently asked. Here is an update on a few.

Sinti Romani-New Testament. The Wycliffe translators are pressing forward with this. It is a painstaking process. They train Sinti believers to translate and work with them to get the original meaning of the Scripture passage. They check the translation with other believers for flow and correct Sinti usage. The translation is then "back translated" into a language (usually English) which the Bible consultant, an expert in the original Greek or Hebrew, can understand.

Keith dubbing scripture media.

The consultant then works with the Wycliffe translators and Sinti translation assistants to make sure the Sinti translation captures and does not distort the original meaning. Once this is done, the approved translation is again checked with Sinti believers for understandability. Before all this begins, the translators work with a group of Sinti believers to come up with appropriate terms for key ideas like "grace" and "faith." And during the whole process, they have been tinkering with spelling systems. What letters should be used to represent the unique sounds of Sinti Romani?

Sinti Romani-scripture media. David and Saul has been dubbed and sent to be reproduced. Acts the book has been translated; the script for the video is nearly ready. When Keith returns from summer meetings and vacation, recording for dubbing can begin.

Western Kalderash-Jesus video. Progress on further translation of the script or further recording has been slow. Keith will not be able to pursue this further until September.

Kalderash, Cyrillic script. Brother Igor Drentza, who heads up the work, has had little time to focus on this project, though the Gospel of John is nearing completion. Other things, like earning a living for his wife and two children and assisting with the Romany church in Vulcanesti, Moldova, have delayed progress.

Kalderash Old Testament. Problems with the translation done by Brother Maximoff, a Kalderash believer who is now deceased, have put this project on hold.

Wycliffe Romany Team has grown to include Keith, the Peters in Germany, the Gardners in Romania, the Fasts (literacy experts), and the van den Heuvels, who plan to survey the different dialects and languages used in Romania. Praise God!

We praise God for each of these projects, and pray for His Holy Spirit to use them to touch hearts.

Partners in Prayer Calendar

Some missionary names omitted due to sensitive nature of work.

SEPTEMBER

15 Rebecca Holmes, 1994, daughter, Keith Holmes & Mary Van Rheenen, Europe
16 William Burnette, 1998, son, Ellen & Rick Burnette, Thailand
16 Christopher Harrell, 1993, son, Melody & Sam Harrell, Kenya
16 _____, unevangelized people group, Asia
17 _____, daught., unevan. grp, M. East/N.Africa
19 Christy Edwards,Global Serv. Corps, France
19 _____, 2002, daughter, unevang. group, Asia
19 _____, daughter, unevang. group, N. Africa
25 _____, Affiliate, Middle East
25 Angel Pittman, urban work, Miami, FL
27 James Shaw, 1985, son, Martha & Rick Shaw, Macedonia
28 _____, Affiliate, Middle East
30 Rebecca Wyatt, 1992, daughter, Kim & Marc Wyatt, Canada

OCTOBER

1 _____, unevangelized people group, Asia
2 _____, unevangel. people group, Middle East
2 Keith Holmes, Romany people, Europe
3 _____, unevangelized people group, Asia
5 Jo Ann Hopper, Emeritus
10 Nomie Derani, internationals, Brooklyn, NY
11 Faith Shaw, 1988, daughter, Martha & Rick Shaw, Macedonia
12 Ben Newell, Rural Poverty Initiative, Helena, Arkansas
13 Fran Turner , HIV/AIDS/public policy coordinator, sub-Saharan Africa
13 Bob Newell, Albanian/Balkan people, Greece
15 _____, son, unevang. people group, Mid East
18 _____, unevang. people group, Mid East
20 Daniel Houser, 1988, son, Ana Marie & Scott Houser, Southern Africa
25 Claire McAtee, Boston, MA
25 _____, scripture translation, Asia
26 Dean Dickens, Mission Teams, Texas
28 Gordon Wood, Affiliate, China
29 Mike Hutchinson, internationals, Paris, FR
30 Virginia Hutchinson, 1991, daughter, Lynn & Mike Hutchinson, France

NOVEMBER

4 Mary-Katherine Williams, Global Service Corps, Brooklyn, NY
5 _____, unevang. pble group, M. East/N. Africa
5 _____, son, unevangelized people group
7 Mike Graham, Affiliate, Asheville, NC
7 Zachary Morrow, 1995, son, Frank & Karen Morrow, Germany
9 Melissa Browning, Global Service Corps, Birmingham, AL
9 Kristen Smith, Global Service Corps, Los Angeles, CA
10 Jim Smith, Associate Coordinator for Mission Teams, Germany
11 _____, unevangelized people group, Asia
12 Caroline Smith, Global Service Corps, South Africa
13 Shelia Earl, work with Albanian/Balkan peoples, Macedonia
13 Earl Martin, Emeritus

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FAMILY, from page 2

possessions. So while some church members worked on renovating and restoring the houses, other members collected furniture, made decorations or purchased other household items – all the while forming a strong relationship between the church and the families. "Althea and Miss Naomi are kind of extended families now," said Don Garland, who has helped coordinate University's work.

The church-to-family model allows churches to make a meaningful, long-term investment with a family. Each church-to-family relationship is unique. Some churches have made repeated trips to the area and completely restored a home. Some churches connected with a family on one trip and committed the finances necessary to restore the family's house. Other churches were matched with specific needs of a family.

Photo - Don Garland

University Church members with Lacombe resident Althea Ducre

Whatever the commitment, the experience has been meaningful for both the churches that contributed and the families that have been able to move on with their lives. It has been "heartwarming and gratifying for both the givers and receivers. Lives have been changed permanently on both ends of the spectrum." said Reid Doster, CBF-LA's disaster response coordinator. Garland reflects, "You help one person at a time. The only way you can [do disaster relief] is by making life better for one person then another person then another. Anything else is good intentions."

Church-to-family relationships are continuing. Broadmoor - Baton Rouge adopted a family and is in process of rebuilding the family's damaged home. First Baptist Asheville, NC has made four trips and has two more planned. Other churches have worked with Rotary International volunteers. It's been a collaborative effort to rebuild, restore and even better the lives of families.

Partly due to the effectiveness of the church-to-family model, families in Lacombe are gradually moving out of their FEMA trailers and back into their restored homes. "It seems like a drop in the bucket, but with these 50 homes, we've made a significant difference," said John Daugherty, CBF-LA coordinator.

September 23
Together for Hope "Pride of Waterproof" weather-proofing event

October 7
Stagg-Tolbert Forum University Baptist Church Baton Rouge

March 16-17
CBF-LA Spring Assembly St. Charles Ave Baptist Church New Orleans

LETTER, from page 6

noting their differences were so great that "Jesus had to sleep between those boys at night so no one ended up getting their throat slit." I also appreciate that CBF works to be a safe place where together we humbly seek discernment. I look forward to further partaking in that fellowship with you in the future.

Sincerely, **Kyle Kelley, Editor**

Coordinator Responds:

Dear Dr. Girod,

Thank you for your comments. I will forward them to Dr. Vestal for his own response to the particulars of the article - a letter of sorts which was shared among CBF folks.

I can tell you that many of us were drawn to the Fellowship to avoid outright politicking and electioneering. And it is always a hard thing to take a prophetic stand when politics seems to be indifferent to the plight of the least able to defend and care for themselves. It is hard because there are always folks who interpret prophecy to be politicking and not preaching. Of course, there is a very fine line.

I know the heart of Dr. Vestal is not about taking a particular, partisan, political stand. I know his heart is about being the presence of Christ. And that is the gist of his comments. I recommended the publishing of this letter because it is a call for Christians to be compassionate, to be about the business of prayer, to be ambassadors of peace with the Prince of Peace, to embrace justice and live mercifully. Moreover, we are called to be the voice of the voiceless, which is rarely a popular position.

I do appreciate your perspective. And I assure you we will be sensitive to avoid electioneering; as long as I am Coordinator here in Louisiana you will not find an endorsement of any candidate nor political party in our publications or meetings. However, I do hope to be courageous with a prophetic voice calling for justice, mercy, compassion, generosity, and grace.

In that spirit, I ask for your continued prayers and support of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Louisiana. We welcome and embrace diversity of opinion, giftedness, calling, and service.

Blessings to you and thank you for your concern and insight,

John Daugherty, CBF-LA Coordinator

Dr. Vestal's article can be found at thefellowship.info, enter the title on the search engine.

CBF-LA Receipts	June-Aug	Fiscal Year 3/01/06-2/28/07
Undesignated	$15,904.37	$38,250.95
Together in Hope	$2,358.34	$7,930.35
Stagg-Tolbert Forum	$27.87	$168.42
New Church Start	$100.00	$6,226.66
Disaster Relief	$200,000.00	$200,000.00
Misc. Designated Funds	--	--
Credits	$375.00	$1,150.00
TOTAL	$218,709.84	$253,736.38

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